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ON PAGE 4 (SECTION I)

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Libya is now Public

Enemy No. 1

FBI diverts agents to hunt 'hit squad'

By James Coates

Chicago Tribune Press Service

WASHINGTON — Faced with a troubling increase in terrorist bombings, shootings and robberies, the FBI has been forced to divert agents from these cases to pursue the Libyan "hit squad" that threatens President Reagan, FBI Director William Webster has disclosed.

In a series of informal conversations with reporters at FBI headquarters, Webster said he has been forced to order agents in nearly every major city to seek out Moslem ethnics and people with names resembling those on a list obtained by intelligence sources and partly publicized early last month.

Webster complained that his job proved to be much more complex than he had anticipated when agents first began searching out such names as Api Chafic, Ahmat Abass, and Ibrahim El Haya.

"SOME OF THOSE names seem exotic to us," said Webster, "but to Libyans they are like Smith and Jones; there are a lot of them."

The director indicated that the checks of individuals with those names continues in the United States and in a number of foreign countries, where the FBI has liaison personnel assigned to embassies.

In addition, agents must check persons with affiliations to two fugitive Americans, Frank Torpil and Edmund Wilson, former CIA agents who have trained Libyan and other terrorists.

"We are spending a lot of time keeping track (of these individuals), making sure we can see connections if they arise," Webster said.

THE COMPLEXITY OF the FBI's job is reflected in the number of aliases used by one of the purported hit men, Ibrahim El Haya.

He also goes by the names of Ibrahim Elhaya, Ibrahim Al-Hays, Ali Ben Ali, Ali Ben-Ala, and Ibrahim Ben-Ali.

Meanwhile, as agents try to cope with the challenge posed by the Libyan problem, terrorist incidents increased last year to 42 nationwide compared with only 29 in 1980.

A variety of political radicals are committing these crimes, he said.

AMONG THOSE considered active and mentioned by Webster were anti-Marcos forces (opposed to Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos); Armenian Turks "interested in retaliation for 1915 atrocities;" the Irish Republican Army (IRA); various Croatian Nationalist groups; Omega 7, an anti-Castro Cuban group; the FALN, a Puerto Rican nationalist group; other Puerto Rican terrorist cadres; Libyans, and the Ku Klux Klan.

The director disclosed that he and FBI analysts have found indications that the remaining members of the Radical Weather Underground are "evolving" into a tightly knit group advocating extreme violence, similar to the Baader-Meinhof Gang in Germany.

Webster described the development a pattern of terrorist groups over the years: at first, many of these enjoy a fairly wide popularity as their exploits are chronicled in the media and as they act in accordance with a currently popular political movement.

HOWEVER, WEBSTER said, a movement later loses popularity and its membership declines. At this point, he said, the remaining members become even more strident, radical and violence prone.

This change, in turn, causes the re-unattractive to potential recruits and the group becomes smaller, making it more difficult to infiltrate, said Webster.

That pattern was followed by the Baader-Meinhof Gang, which is now inactive, Webster said. The recent arrests of Weather Underground figures after the Brink's robbery in New York in which a policeman and two security guards were killed indicates that the American group may be moving in that direction, he said.

BUT WEBSTER said that the Brink's robbery has not been classified as a terrorist crime by the FBI.

"We're treating it as we would any bank robbery," he said.

On a more optimistic note, Webster said his agents hope that the arrest in New York City of persons charged with two bombings in support of the Croatian terrorist movement will largely neutralize that group.

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Claimed terrorist incidents, 1980

Total incidents in U.S. and Puerto Rico: 29

